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SUBJECT: TURKEY: PM ERDOGAN WARNS CODEL CASEY ON AGR

Classified By: CDA Doug Silliman, for reasons 1.4(b,d)

Summary

¶1. (C) Senators Robert Casey (D-PA), Ted Kaufman (D-DE), and Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ), and Representative Timothy Walz (D-MN) and Charge met May 29 with PM Erdogan, TGS D/CHOD General Igsiz, and a senior MFA delegation led by U/S Apakan. On Armenia, PM Erdogan urged Congress to leave the events of 1915 to the historians, warning that the passage of an Armenian Genocide Resolution would have a detrimental impact on Turkey-Armenian talks as well as Nagorno-Karabakh developments. Once Azerbaijan and Armenia resolve their differences, he continued, Turkey and Armenia can sort out their problems. On the Middle East, he argued that the U.S. must view Hamas as a "political reality" that must be dealt with. General Igsiz highlighted the high level of cooperation between the Turkish and U.S. militaries and solicited additional assistance from Congress for the fight against the PKK. On Afghanistan, Igsiz said the TGS is considering additional contributions, and noted that Turkey is trying to increase political cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan through its trilateral summit process. U/S Apakan reemphasized the importance of all aspects of the bilateral relationship. He explained GOT engagement with Hamas is part of Turkey's overall policy of pragmatic engagement to reach a peace settlement and should not be interpreted as tacit support. End Summary.

Prime Minister

¶2. (C) During a 90 minute meeting, PM Erdogan provided an overview of current domestic and foreign policy issues. On Armenia, he urged that the events of 1915 be left to "historians and archeologists" and warned that a Congressional Armenian Genocide Resolution would have a "very negative effect on Turkey-Armenia talks" and would also have a detrimental impact on the Nagorno-Karabakh problem. Erdogan noted that the latest efforts on N-K have been quite positive, in contrast to 18 years of the Minsk Group process which have had no results. On the Middle East, he said that the U.S. needs to adopt a very different approach, coming to terms with Hamas as a "political reality."

¶3. (C) Senator Casey took issue with Erdogan's portrayal of Israeli actions during the December 2008 Gaza Crisis is "disproportionate," insisting that Hamas should be seen as a terrorist organization and, as such, should not be engaged by the USG. Senator Lautenberg also challenged Erdogan's view

of the Middle East, underscoring that Israeli textbooks would never condone the killing of Arab children or adults -- but that in the Arab world the reverse is routinely seen.

¶4. (C) Erdogan replied that he does not consider Hamas a terrorist organization but, instead, as a organization attempting to defend its people. He acknowledged that Hamas had fired rockets into Israel, but underscored -- quoting Shimon Perez -- that the resulting casualties had numbered "no more than two or three." In Gaza, however, 1500 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli attacks. Erdogan noted that Hamas has accepted the 1967 borders, a fact which American audiences seem to have missed. He complained that Gaza today is an "open air prison -- something we can never say yes, to."

¶5. (C) Turning to the Caucasus, Erdogan said he was well aware that an AGR sponsor was "in this very room" (a reference to Rep. Walz) and questioned whether such sponsors simply joined up with their colleagues without listening "to all the stakeholders." He noted that Azerbaijan and Armenia should sort out their problems. If they succeed, he said, then Turkey and Armenia can work out their issues. (COMMENT: Erdogan again did not frame these as parallel processes, but instead as sequential actions. END COMMENT)

¶6. (C) Walz told Erdogan that he had "clearly heard" the message regarding the AGR, and that he had taken it seriously. He assured Erdogan that he would "never take a decision not based on the facts."

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Turkish General Staff

¶7. (C) In a meeting shortened by the lengthy encounter with the PM, Deputy Chief of Defense Gen Hasan Igsiz praised the high level of coordination between the U.S. and Turkish militaries, including CHOD Gen Basbug's visit to DC, two visits by CJCS Adm Mullen to Turkey, and good coordination with MNF-I in Iraq. He thanked the CODEL for good U.S. cooperation against the PKK saying that Turkey feels that "it is not only our problem any more." He said that 2009 provides an opportunity to eliminate the PKK and asked the CODEL to press for "northern Iraqi local authorities" (the Kurdistan Regional Government -- KRG) and KRG President Masoud Barzani to take concrete action. He asked the CODEL for support in providing to Turkey AH-1W attack helicopters and an armed predator so the Turkish military has the tools it needs to fight the PKK. On Afghanistan, Igsiz said the TGS is considering additional contributions, and noted that Turkey is trying to increase political cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan through its trilateral summit process.

Foreign Ministry

¶8. (C) U/S Ertugrul Apakan hosted a lunch at the MFA also attended by Deputy U/S Haydar Berk, Special Envoy for Iraq Murat Ozcelik, and Deputy Director for Middle East and newly appointed Ambassador to Syria Omer Onhon. Apakan reaffirmed the strong bilateral relationship between the two countries, adding that the GOT is looking to further develop and diversify its ties with the U.S. Apakan highlighted the recent positive developments Turkey's normalization efforts with Armenia. He said that the GOT expects to have full relations with Armenia within 1-2 years and, at the same time, to see progress on resolving issues between Armenia and Azerbaijan in parallel to the Armenian-Turkish talks. Apakan warned that a genocide resolution from the U.S. would hurt the progress made on all fronts, stall talks, and severely

strain the relationship between all the involved countries. Rep. Walz reassured the MFA officials that a genocide resolution in the House was not a statement on how the U.S. views the U.S.-Turkey relationship, adding that the U.S. bond with Turkey is unwavering.

¶9. (C) On the Middle East, Senator Lautenberg encouraged Turkey not to legitimize Hamas, and to push Syria to make greater efforts to halt the flow of foreign fighters in Iraq across its borders. Apakan said that although GOT officials speak with Hamas as part of Turkey's overall policy of engagement, it should not be interpreted as tacit endorsement. Rather, Turkey supports Palestinian unity and PA leader Abbas as the sole leader of all Palestinians. At the same time, Turkey also places importance on Israeli security and integrity. He underscored that while the GOT does not approve of the Israeli handling of the Gaza crisis, the MFA had issued a statement condemning each occasion of Hamas violence. On Syria, Onhon said Turkey supports the Syrian-Israeli talks and aims to be an honest broker between the two sides. He added that the MFA feels a change in Syrian President Assad's attitude, but SARG usually adopts a "wait and see" foreign policy in order to gauge the other side's sincerity before acting. Nevertheless, once Syria decides to do something, it delivers. Onhon concluded that Damascus claimed it no longer meddles in Lebanon because "it costs too much and Syria is no longer able to afford it."

Comment

¶10. (C) The differences between the statements of PM Erdogan and MFA U/S Apakan on Turkey-Armenian reconciliation and the Middle East were striking. Erdogan, ever the politician, repeated populist (and not entirely factually correct) perceptions of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Caucasus, while Apakan reiterated the view of the MFA, which must keep all of these difficult peace processes moving forward.

¶11. (SBU) CODEL Casey did not have an opportunity to clear

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this message.

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